

The Modern State and Human Values

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The Cloister and the Hearth is not as widely read as formerly. Indeed for those who desire historical accuracy, it is not a reliable novel. Nevertheless, I know of no book which gives so vivid a picture of the closing years of the Middle Ages. Gerard, the hero of the book, is the father of Erasmus who, more than any other man, signified the closing of one epoch in human history and the dawning of another. In the exciting adventures of Gerard, the reader receives a vivid impression of an age in which there were no tariff barriers and no passports, but an age in which mercenaries, pilgrims, and students jostled each other along the great highways of Europe. The Holy Roman Empire retained a shadowy authority over the people of Europe because nationalism had not yet come to its flowering. The Catholic Church still retained the undivided allegiance of the faithful because the Teutonic peoples had not come to a religious self-consciousness.

It was in many respects an impressive, if somewhat inelastic unity which Europe presented, but the end was bound to come. In the famous dialogue between the Earl of Warwick and the Bishop of Beauvais in Bernard Shaw's play "Saint Joan," the Bishop of Beauvais says to Warwick, "As a priest I have gained knowledge of the minds of common people and there you will find a more dangerous idea. I can express it only by such phrases as 'France for the French, England for the English, Italy for the Italians, Spain for the Spanish . . .'" The retort of Warwick is that the protest is that of the individual soul against in-

terference of priest or peer. "If I had to find a name for it, I should," he said, "call it Protestantism."

The good Bishop had not long to wait for the fulfilment of his words. With the breakdown of Medieval solidarity, there came a full-fledged nationalism. Henry VIII, Francis I, Charles V are all Renaissance monarchs, rejoicing in their sense of power. The process of disintegration, once begun, had to work itself out. Hobbes was the great apologist for absolute monarchy, Locke defended limited monarchy, and towards the end of the Eighteenth Century, Godwin, Paine and Rousseau were advocating a democracy in which the people at last had come into their own. It was this philosophy, incidentally, which influenced the Declaration of Rights preceding the War of American Independence. The American Constitution itself was largely shaped by religious independence and by this particular ferment in political thinking.

After the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the individualistic democracy at the close of the Eighteenth Century, there was a fourth stage, reached roughly by the middle of the Nineteenth Century. The great legal writer, A. V. Dicey, has called this last period the "age of collectivism." Individualism has many advantages. In economics, it worked extremely well while markets were expanding and fresh trade was being continually developed. In politics it justified itself in its removal of all hindrances to individual initiative. To free a man from encumbrances is to render that man service. But individualism had its

grave disadvantages. If the State is only content to act as umpire while the fight is in progress and not directly to interfere, great hardship is done to those who are the weak and unprivileged and handicapped. This began to be realized as the Nineteenth Century wore on and so the State began increasingly to interfere on behalf of those who must need its help. Gradually, in the course of collectivist legislation, the State extended its scope. It not merely removed hindrances but endeavored to create the right conditions for the living of the good life. This meant inevitably that the State by its very paternalism increased in power. This growth in the authority and prestige of the State was enormously increased by three factors in our modern world.

The ever-widening complexity of economic relations hastened the development from individual to state trading. There came the familiar stages of the private employer, the limited company, the combine, the monopoly, and then the direct or indirect control of the state. This has not only been true of internal but of external trade so that a state more and more engages in trade talks with other states. In the recent discussions on the Marshall Plan, many of the nations under the influence of Russia adopted an attitude of economic nationalism.

But the modern state has not only grown in power because of the ramifications of commerce; it has also become more powerful through the epoch-making discoveries in science. We live at this moment in an age of atomic energy, and this one discovery by itself threatens our very lives. It is obvious that discoveries of this magnitude cannot be entrusted to individuals but must be under the care and responsibility of the State. That means once again an increase in the power of the State over the individual lives of its citizens.

The third factor is the most impor-

tant of all. We have suffered from two world wars with their long and bitter aftermath. After this second conflict the greater part of the world lies exhausted and most grievously sick. When Henry Carter returned from a recent trip to Europe, he spoke of the heart of Europe as only faintly beating. This condition produces fear and insecurity. People are not capable of making their own decisions. They fly too easily to the security and authority of the State. Above everything else, they desire to be freed from the nightmare of recurrent want and disease and war, and it seems to them that only in a strong and efficient State can they be secure. Although in the First World War one of the great slogans by which young men were urged to go out and fight was the slogan that 'we were going to make the world safe for democracy', the world became most dangerously unsafe for democracy; and Communism, Naziism, and Fascism, grew out of a congenial soil. In like fashion the conclusion of the six years of the Second World War made inevitable the further growth of totalitarianism. Democracy flourishes in days of peace, and struggles desperately in days when the hearts of men have failed because of the things that have come to pass on the earth.

It is indeed a strange and fearful situation in which we find ourselves. Enlightened thinkers in all countries recognize that we have come by the movement of history to a point when a nation cannot achieve its own strength. They have come to recognize further that even an alliance of nations cannot hope to gain its own ends against another alliance of nations. By the very logic of history men are being driven to a society of nations and that inevitably involves a limitation of the absolute sovereignty of national States. And yet at this very time when the safety of us all depends upon world law and some form of world community and the limitation of national pow-

er, we are being confronted with the spectacle of nationalism, naked and unashamed. But if the modern collectivist State is not willing to limit its sovereignty in the interests of world peace, is it likely to limit its sovereign power within the State for the preservation of human values? But before that question can be answered, it must be recognized that here are two directions in which the modern State can move. One is toward the police State in which the individual is set at a discount and the other is towards an organic democracy in which the individual feels himself to be an integral part of the whole. It can be stated in another way. The issue in the future lies between a social democracy and a communistic form of democracy.

It is easy to see how nations drunk with sight of power, find it easy to become rigid and authoritarian. Philosophically the idea of human rights rests on the premise that man had rights first of all in the state of nature and these were guaranteed to him when he entered society. But when another school of thought arose and explained history in terms of economics, and spoke philosophically in terms of dialectical materialism, the whole Eighteenth Century philosophy of individual rights came crashing to the ground. Once you cease to believe in God, you cease to believe in the importance of man. If he has been cast accidentally on to the shores of time and if there is no God to whom he is responsible, the race goes to the strong and the State may sweat, exploit or oppress a man with impunity. If God goes, the State will occupy the vacuum which has been created; and man, instead of worshipping God, will be called upon to worship the omniscient State.

The Eighteenth Century defense of human values has not only been exposed to the withering fire of Marx and Engels, and indeed of the great Nineteenth Century European social-

ists; it has been undermined by its own inadequate philosophy. With varying degrees of awareness, it began to be realized in the Western democracies that if an individual be credited with certain rights, then these rights may be insisted upon even in opposition to the State. This atomistic view of human nature could lead directly to anarchy and disorder. It became more and more clear that there must be an identification of interest between the individual and the State in the service of the common good. The first indication of this change of attitude is to be found in the writings of Mazzini. There are, he said, no rights but duties. In England, T. H. Green, Edward Caird and Bernard Bosanquet spoke each in his own way, not of rights but of obligations. Jefferson once wrote that a man has no private rights in opposition to his social charities. It was the setting forth of that organic democracy in which, to quote the glowing words of Edmund Burke, there is a living partnership of the governed.

It is this type of collectivism that we believe must be a pattern for modern democracies. But this dynamic conception of an organic State in which justice is done both to the whole and to the part, cannot possibly be realized except through the Christian Faith. For it demands two great Christian postulates. There must be first of all the Christian valuation of God. Since God is Father and Lord, the State can never be an end in itself. It is an ordinance of God and can be either a worthy or unworthy instrument in His hands. "There is no power but God," said John Wesley. "To Him peoples and governments are alike responsible." In the second place, there is required the Christian valuation of man. Of himself, the individual person has no importance; but he is of infinite significance as one for whom Christ died. The great service of Swedish theology in our day has been to

direct attention once again to the *agape* of God. He loves the unlovely, and desires us despite our lack of merit.

We speak of inalienable human values because man is no disconsolate wanderer in an alien universe, but is the very child of God. It is for this reason that Kant's maxim remains wholly Christian. No man must be treated as a means towards another man's end.

The modern State, if it is to function properly, must rest on this religious principle; but how can this be done except through the uncompromising witness of the Church to the claims of God and the infinite worth of man? And within the mystical company, which is the very body of Christ, who can fulfill this function better than the Methodist Church throughout the world? We were raised up to stress the truth that a man can be saved by faith in God; that a man can be joyously aware of that salvation and that a man can press on to full salvation. It is all an amazing commentary on the significance of the individual in God's sight, and upon the amazing possibilities that open out to the humblest believer.

It is the universal Church, in which we Methodists proudly take our place, that must ever express the conscience of the community. But conscience does not merely disapprove the wrong; it also approves the good. It is part of our witness to say, No! to the overwhelming pretensions of the State. We have to offer an unwavering defense when human values are threatened. We dare not leave one sphere of activity to the State and occupy our-

selves only with pietistic concerns. We cannot surrender the Crown Rights of the Redeemer. But as we say, No! to Caesar worship, we say, Yes! whenever the State takes any action which is timely, expedient and morally justifiable, for we recognize that the State is, in the argument of Paul's letter to the Romans, a constituted authority of God for the restraint of evil and the maintenance of good. Our task therefore is not only to defend human values against any encroachment of the State, but to approve any action which more fully conserves those values and enables man as a free and responsible agent to take his proper place within the life of the whole.

We who belong to the church are, in the words of Jesus, the salt of the earth. Salt is a pungent preservative against corruption. That is the reason the church has an essential part to play in the life of every country. If we succeed in our task, we may save civilization. In God's dealings with Abraham, the city was spared because of ten righteous men. If we are cowardly or timid or apathetic in the day of testing, we pass under the condemnation of God. There is no judgment more terrible than that passed upon the salt that has lost its savour. If we fail in our duty we become that savourless salt that is good for nothing but to be trodden under the foot of men.

The Church is often derided and misunderstood, and is most certainly subject to strange neglect. Nevertheless it proclaims the Word of God, and that Word is the very charter of democracy and the final vindicator of the common man.